Binary Stars

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Binary Stars

by HybridOwl

Summary

Stan calls to have Ford fix the machine, but Fillbrick picks up. Stan still gets kicked out. But this time, Ford isn't giving him up without a fight.

Stanley's hands are shaking. He knows they are, hyperaware of the sensations he's feeling.

The dark of the school hallway, empty from the late hour. The squeaks of his sneakers on the linoleum as he shifts in his spot. His hand gripping the schools telephone tight enough his knuckles are turning white, but not enough to stop the damn shaking. The dial tone, which seemed to go on, and on, and on.

Ford has to pick up. Stanley knows he's supposed to be asleep, tomorrow is his big day, but damnit, Ford needs to pick up. Stanley can't do this by himself.

He hears the click of the phone being picked up on the other end, and has less than a second of hope before it's ripped to pieces.

"I don't know why you are calling so late, but this ain't the type of household that tolerates it." Fillbrick Pines says on the other end of the phone, and Stanley wilts, leaning his other arm against the wall and curling in on himself. He considers hanging up, but he can't, even if this is the worst possible scenario.

"Hey pops." Stanley says, trying to keep the shake of his hands out of his voice. "Can I talk to Ford?"

The other side of the line is quiet for what feels like an excruciatingly long time.

"What did you do?" Fillbrick says, and Stanley feels the ice in it go down his spine.

"I uh. I'm at the school. I need- I broke-" His eyes swim with stupid, useless tears, but his voice doesn't show it, which he's thankful for. "I broke Ford's experiment, and Ford needs to come fix it."

He hears a low curse on the other side of the line, and grimaces. He rubs a fist against his eyes, digging in the knuckles a bit. This is going to be so bad. But maybe because he owned

up to it, maybe-

"You know how important the fair is for Stanford. For our family. And you wrecked it."

"But-" Stanley tries, but is quickly cut off.

"When have I ever accepted excuses? I knew it. You always make things worse, you idiot." Stanley doesn't answer. There's no need; his dad is right, after all. "I'm going to wake Stanford up. I'm going to drive him to the school. You are going to get him in to the gym, and he is going to fix that machine. You will do everything possible to help him. And while Stanford is at the fair tomorrow, I want you to get your useless carcass out of my house. For good."

Stanley nods, throat choked up, and then remembers his dad- that Mr. Pines can't see him.

"Understood." He chokes out, and listens to the dial tone when the other end of the line is hung up, the sound working well with the way his life is crumbling around him.

—

Something is off with Stan. Ford had gone and fixed the machine with little difficulty, chewing Stan out in a whisper just in case there might be someone on patrol in the school. And Stan… had said nothing. Well, he had answered questions in one or two word replies, he handed Ford tools when he needed them, but he wouldn't meet Ford's eyes, and his voice was dull, lifeless. It wasn't like Stan at all.

When Ford leaves for the science fair, confident, tie precisely straightened, Stan still looks so miserable Ford decides to give him a peace offering.

"High six?" Ford says, hand up. Stan looks at him with an expression Ford can't read, eyes weirdly bright, and pulls Ford into a fierce, bone crushing hug. Ford is surprised at first, but

eventually returns it, tucking his nose into Stan's collar and guiltily inhaling Stan's scent there.

As much as he's enjoying this, as much as this feels like everything he's ever wanted but can't have, it's also a reminder of why he can't have it.

Stan is his brother. His big, doofy, caring brother who sees Ford as someone to protect, or as a brother, but will never see him the way Ford wants him to.

So Ford pulls out of the hug, pats Stan's shoulder awkwardly, and hopefully manages to not meet Stan's eye in a natural seeming way. He doesn't even look back when he leaves, too embarrassed and determined to put all this behind him.

Ford goes to the science fair. He gets the scholarship. He spends a few hours celebrating with his few, kind-of friends. And then he gets home. He wants to share this feeling with Stan, because even though he's still a little mad at Stan for breaking the machine last night, and even though he knows logically that exposing himself to the addiction of Stan's approval and affection isn't going to make his little problem better, he also knows that no joy feels real until he can celebrate it with his twin.

Only Stan isn't around. When he asks Ma and Pops where they went, he sees Ma has been crying, and Pops is even more impassive than before. And then Filbrick tells him what happened, and all the joy is sucked out of Ford like air in a vacuum, replaced by dread and nothingness.

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Ford spend the summer looking for Stan, but he can't find a trace, and he's forced to go to school early for orientation, both general freshman orientation and on the specifics of his increased class load. His roommate is rarely in their dorm, and when Ford isn't obsessively studying or trying unsuccessfully to find a lead on Stan, he plays Dungeons, Dungeons, and More Dungeons, and meets a freshman from the neighboring university of Backupsmore named Fiddleford that Ford immediately hits it off with intellectually.

Fidds doesn't care about Fords getting lost in his schoolwork, his tendency to spend days in front of a board trying to put pins on where Stanley might be.

Ford considers using his summers to hit the road and look for his twin personally, but this is his information center, and if he takes classes through summer he can manage everything into getting his PhD in 4 years, and then he can look for Stan full time, or maybe if he's found Stan by then… maybe Stan could join him, wherever Ford's work takes him. A few drug induced and too honest talks with Fidds had made Ford realize that he doesn't care if his feelings aren't reciprocated, if the world thinks it's wrong; wherever Stan is, that's where Ford wants to be. Maybe they could save up after Ford got some work after school, get a boat like they always wanted…

But first, Ford has to find him.

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Ford knows on the outside, he looks like the perfect student. But he's self distracting in a major way, unable to do anything but work and obsess. He hopes Stan is doing better. He hopes Stan is doing worse. He hopes Stan needs him as much as he needs Stan.

It takes until the fall semester of his final year to get a lead, and it isn't one he's expecting. He's started looking miserably through local death records, fearing the worst, when he segways into arrest warrants. And suddenly, a path opens up.

He's able to follow report after report across the country, some illegal or just underhanded scheme with either his brother's name or his fingerprints all over it. The commercials are the weirdest ones, when he finds them; for the first time he regrets giving up watching tv at 16.

By the time he finishes his finals for the semester, he's near vibrating with excitement. Finally, he has a lead. Finally, he's going to find his brother, his Stan.

His excitement is slightly lessened by the fourth week of winter break and no sign of him. He knows by the paper trail that Stan sometimes drops off the map for a bit and pops up in a new and random area, but Ford had thought he'd gotten wind of one of Stan's current endeavors,

not missing the tail end of it. Following Stan's acquaintances is hard, because they're always tight-lipped and loyal or angry and spitting mad. A woman had thrown a frying pan at Ford on sight, and judging by the accusations, Ford's not 100% sure he can blame her.

The snow is falling heavily this far into winter, and he's technically supposed to be back at school in 16 hours, finishing his last semester, but he can't give up. He's so close, he knows it.

He's in a diner at 11pm on a Sunday, staring unseeing out the window and trying to connect dots that just aren't there when he hears a pair of policemen grumbling a couple of booths behind him, saying that damn car is parked under the overpass again, but by tomorrow, the cold or the state patrol will have taken care of it.

The car sounds familiar. Very, very familiar. It's a long shot - it's not exactly one of a kind - but it's all Ford has, so he pays his bill and carefully drives to the only overpass near the little diner, brain warning him not to hope even though his traitorous heart is doing it anyway.

And it's Stan's car. It's unmistakable. Ford knows the ding on the bumper like he knows his 12 fingers. He drives up behind the car, shuts off his own.

He takes a second to breathe, grip tight to the steering wheel, before shaking himself and getting out. It's insanely cold, and Ford is not dressed to be out in it, his car warm enough he hadn't put on his coat. He won't back out now though.

He knocks on the fogged up window, teeth chattering, other arm wrapped around himself.

No answer.

He knocks again, and this time the window rolls down, and a familiar voice is speaking.

"Listen officer, I just stopped here for a moment, swear I'll be moving on in just a-"

Ford knows the exact moment Stan's autopilot turns off and he actually sees Ford, because he freezes.

The most generous way Ford can describe how Stan looks is like shit. There's bags under his eyes, newspaper stuffed in the collar of his jacket, and a 5 day old stubble taking over his face. He looks like he hasn't eaten enough for far too long.

"Stan." Ford starts, and then fails to continue because the wind blows and he has to clench his everything against the bite of it.

He didn't know what Stan was going to do next, but what he least expects is for Stan to flick off the ignition on his car , and open the door, pulling Ford into a hug and scolding him.

"What are you thinking, poindexter? It's below 10, you're smarter than this." And the fact that Stan is here is doing more to warm Ford than his body.

But it is insanely cold out here.

"My car." Ford chatters out, and Stan hesitates for a second, then grabs Ford by the elbow and gently steers Ford to his own car, like maybe Ford will get lost. Once Ford is in the driver's seat, Stan moves to double back, and Ford makes a protesting noise, grabbing the edge of Stan's jacket.

"Gotta shut my window Sixer, don't want snow in there on top of everything else." Ford reluctantly let's go, visions of Stan leaving him without a trace (again, again) not leaving his minds' eye until the passenger door swings open and Stan swoops inside, shutting the door to preserve the heat. Ford is very, very glad he had had the heat so high before he turned off the car, turns it back on.

They're silent for a moment that seems to Ford to stretch on to infinity.

"What are you doing here, Sixer?" Stan asks, quietly. He doesn't meet Ford's eyes, looking at the markings on the dash instead. Ford draws himself up, pushing his glasses up his nose to make sure he has a good view of his brother.

"I'm here to take you home." Ford forces his voice to be confident, because the alternative is too disastrous to think of. Stan laughs; it's not a happy sound.

"C'mon Sixer, I don't have a home. I don't know if the old man told you, but he told me never to come back, so I'm not gonna." Stan says, and he sounds bitter, but the worst part is, Ford can tell he believes it, and it makes Ford see red.

"Bullshit!" He snaps, and that makes Stanley look at him. "Bullshit. You- Stanley, I-"

This was the problem. This conversation, this- this whatever it isn't, with Stan, it requires being in touch with his emotions, allowing himself to be vulnerable. No amount of logic would work on Stan, or make this situation better. But logic was all Ford's ineffective brain could manage.

"There are many definitions of a home. It's defined by the person or people using the term. Home isn't always a place. Sometimes it's a person. Sometimes-" he stops himself, because he needs to say it. "Stanley, I'm in love with you. I've loved you my whole life. Like a brother, but also more. Like everything. You're my home. And I was hoping I could be yours."

He can't look at Stan, and Stan isn't making making any noise, and Ford's stupid, too smart brain starts yelling abort, abort, abort-

"Besides- I'm in my last semester at college. I could- use some help." Ford manages to force out, cursing himself and his stilted tone of voice and offering the out when he has to know, it's killing him not to know.

"I'm not going to be able to do anything about your nerd stuff, poindexter." Stan says dubiously, but Ford jumps on the thread of 'I'm listening' in his tone.

"I don't expect you to; that would be academic dishonesty anyway, I could get kicked out. No, I- I sometimes fall into studying binges, forget to get groceries or make food when I have them, the apartment is a wreck-"

"So… you could use me around to help do day to day stuff. Like a maid." Stan says slowly, puzzling it out, and then grins. "Ya gonna have me wear one of those French maid uniforms?"

Ford sputters out a denial, red in the face and inarticulate at how clearly he can picture his brothers' strong, hairy thighs peeking out from a frilly and too short skirt. He's glad he's sitting down, because the image might have knocked Ford over otherwise.

"You are the absolute *worst* . Why do I put up with you?" Ford finally manages, glaring somewhere around Stan's right ear so he doesn't have to meet Stan's eyes and flush all over again.

Somehow, this whole thing is worse after not seeing his brother in so long. Because Stanley looks like shit from his situation, but he also still looks like *Stanley* , which has always been Ford's real issue.

"Because I'm the alpha twin!" Stan cackles, and Ford huffs, trying to hide how his heart is in his throat. Stan hadn't answered him. Stan looks at him still grinning in a way Ford realizes now is a little forced, and Stan must see the fear or disappointment or whatever stupid emotion Ford can't hide from his brother, and Stan swallows.

"C'mon Sixer. You gotta know." Stan says, voice somehow gruff and soft, in that way Ford's only heard Stan manage. Stan clears his throat, looks away, looks back out of the corner of his eye.

"You gotta know I'm crazy about you. I'd do anything to keep you with me. That's why I've had to let you go."

Ford shakes his head, reaches out his hand, hopes Stan will take it.

"Don't let me go."

Stan stares at him, searching his face, before nodding, intertwining their fingers. They fit perfectly, like they always have, Stan's fingers perfectly encircled by Ford's.

"Alright. I won't let you go." Stan says, then laughs; it's a little wet. Then he surprises Ford by bringing their locked hands up to kiss the back of Ford's hand, and his stomach swoops even as he scolds himself for reacting like a victorian maiden. Stan didn't even kiss him on the mouth. "You're gonna be so sick of me."

Ford shrugs. "Not if you're sick of me first. Also," he can't help but squirm, pushing his enormous luck, "my lips are over here."

This seemed like just the right invitation. Stan's eyes become focused in a way Ford hasn't ever seen, eyes dark, licking his lips. Stan uses his free hand to wrap around the back of Ford's head, fingers curling in the hair at the nape of Ford's neck. Ford's eyes flutter involuntarily, and he sees Stan smirk at it.

"You better be ready to be sick of me, because I'm not ever gonna let you go now." Stan says quietly, and Ford knows it's not a threat, or a tease, or a flirtation.

It's a vow.

"Binary stars stay in each other's orbit forever, or they destroy themselves." Ford says, and It's a fact, but that's not what he means, even if it is. Stan seems to understand, eyes all soft.

"Binary stars it is." Stan says, and then he's kissing Ford.

It's hot, and wet, and every one of Ford's extremities are numb or tingling, but Ford feels the vow in this too. He reaches to hold his brother close, and knows he's right where he should

be.

—

It takes a lot shorter time to get back to school than it did to zigzag after Stan the other way, both of them driving their cars (at least partially so they can't keep pulling each other in for another kiss, and another, and another-) and Ford is mentally calculating the wasted gas, them stopping only once to eat at a diner at 5am where the server does a double take looking at them, like they'd never seen twins before. Maybe they hadn't. But Stan's personality fills the room, and nobody notices Ford's hands.

When they get back, and Stan drops his duffle just inside the doorway and starts to complain about "the mess, what the hell Sixer, you making tornados in here?"

And Ford looks at Stan, and then the apartment, and then at Stan again, and reels Stan in for a kiss that hopefully will end with more. He wants all of Stan, and he knows Stan wants all of him, too.

They can figure out the rest of their lives tomorrow.

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